



Initiative Marvel



 193 12 18

Chapter 1 by Karra

As a little girl my father used to read me his old comics, I loved the idea that people could have powers, and save people.

Now I'm 16, and I'm the worlds youngest genius, and I have a plan to make my fathers comics come to life.

Chapter 2 by Jess Ash



I sit in the lab, carefully pouring 112 mL of sulfamethoxazole ($C_{10}H_{11}N_3O_3S$) from graduated cylinder into a beaker.

"Test 43," I say to the microphone. "I am placing the chemicals into the same beaker..."

The beaker foams, flashes green. I sigh.

"Taking cover."

I duck under the table as the spray coats the room. Getting up, I sigh again.

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I drop my rag and walk over. Rubbing my hands on my lead-lined apron, then pull open the door. Most of the beakers are a dull purple, indicating failure. Most, but not all.

"This is one for the books," I whisper. "Test 42 is a success."

Chapter 3 by Jess Ash



I quickly rush to the phone. Picking up the receiver, I push the button marked "Reception".

After 3 rings, Robyn picks up. "Yes?"

"Hey, Robyn, can you send Dr. Whitmer down here? I've got something he's going to want to see."

"Yep, I'll send him down."

"Thanks, Robyn."

I hang up the phone then set about tidying up the lab. Dr. Whitmer is the one who's been getting funding for my project. I don't want to look like an amateur that can't even clean up.

By the time there's a knock on the door, the lab looks spotless. All the used beakers awaiting cleaning are by the sink. The counters are wiped down, and everything is in its proper place. I check that I'm wearing my apron and my goggles, then open the door.

"Dr. Whitmer," I acknowledge. "Thank you for coming on such short notice."

"It's no trouble, Dr. Lee." He grabs an apron and a pair of goggles. "What are we looking at here?"

"I think I may have had success with the superserum, I mean, the formula."

He looks at me curiously at my use of "superserum", my nickname for the liquid that will make heroes. Fortunately, he dismisses it with a flick of his wrist.

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"Can I see the test?"

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"Of course."

I retrieve Test 42 from the cooler. It glows faintly blue once removed from the the bright interior of the refrigeration unit. I smile. It looks just like something out of one of Dad's comics.

I set the beaker in front of him. He examines the sample, then turns to me.

"I want some tests run on this. Then, we'll talk testing."

With that, he hangs up his apron and goggles and walks out.

I stare at his retreating back, then spring into action. I grab what equipment I have in the lab, and get to work. When I've exhausted the immediate resources, I send some up to Level 3 for in-depth chemical analysis.

It takes a few days for the full analysis to come back, but eventually, it gets back to me. I walk in on Friday to a thick white envelope, the kind that can fit whole sheets of copy paper without bending them.

I rip it open, flipping past the first few sheets. Graphs, charts, diagrams... I growl in frustration. Finally, I find the page I'm looking for. I scan the sheet, and my eyes come to rest on the chemical formula.

I read the long name, lips forming each syllable. When I finish reading, I break into a grin. It's perfect. It's exactly what I want.

Quickly, I compose myself. I have to call Dr. Whitmer. I grab the phone, dialing his number.

"Dr. Whitmer."

"Doctor," I say, a bit rushed, "the test is a success."

"Excellent. I'll have some mice sent to your testing facility."

My adrenaline promptly crashes. What does he mean? I can't test on MICE. This is a HUMAN drug.

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"Sir, but I haven't calculated the dosage for mice. The drug is designed for humans."

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"Dr. Lee, I respect you and the work you do, but if you think this facility is going to put an untested drug in a human being you are out of your mind." His voice goes softer. "Try the mice."

and we'll go from there, okay?"

"Yes, Dr. Whitmer."

I put the phone back on the hook with a sigh. Looks like it'll be another few years before I see a superhero.

Chapter 4 by Jess Ash



I don't even bother reporting to the lab on Monday. Instead, I go straight to the testing facility. Robyn and Dr. Whitmer both know I'll be there. I go down to the basement, swipe my card, and walk into my spotlessly white testing room.

I glare at the cage of mice in a childish manner. It's not their fault I can't test on a human, but I'm frustrated with them nonetheless.

With a sigh, I pick up the cardboard box that will contain my "superserum". I open it up, and there it sits, glowing faintly blue in the box's dark interior. I pull out the glass container, set it on the counter next to the mice.

I stare at the two. My mind isn't on the test. I let out a low growl and run my fingers through my hair. The mice squeak, and scurry away from my, rushing in a white wave to the other side of the cage.

"Why is it always white mice?" I wonder aloud. "Surely any color of mice would do."

My phone buzzes. I grab it from my pocket, glancing at the caller I.D. It's Dr. Stelk, the man who runs the facility.

"Hello?"

"Is everything alright, Dr. Lee?" He sounds concerned. "Stacia said your behavior was a little strange today. Are you feeling well?"

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"Thank you for your concern, Doctor, but I'm fine." Maybe my tone is a little sharp. So what?

"Alright, dear. Good luck with the testing."

I hang up. The phone goes back in my pocket. I walk over to the other box on the counter and open it up. It's filled to the brim with disposable syringes.

For some reason this strikes me as absurdly funny. I begin to giggle. I grab a syringe from the box, still giggling.

I walk back over to Test 42, pop the cork out of the container. Syringe goes in, is filled, comes out.

15 mL. That's all it takes for a human. A mouse is far smaller so, according to my calculations, 2 mL should do. I make sure I've gotten the appropriate amount.

I turn to the mice. With the syringe in one hand, I pull one out. It squeaks in protest, squirming in my hand.

"Sorry darling," I whisper. "Today is not your lucky day."

With no further hesitation, I plunge the syringe into the mouse's body. Depressing the plunger, I let out another giggle.

"Maybe I should have stayed home today," I whisper to no one in particular. I glance down at the mouse, which is now writhing on the countertop. "I bet you wish I did."

Abruptly, it stops twisting and stands up. Hesitantly, it totters across the steel surface, then collapses.

"Oh," I croon, "did you die? Tell me you didn't die. They'll cut a lot of my funding if you died."

The mouse erupts into flames. 30 seconds later, the only thing that remained was a pile of bones.

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"Whoops" I giggled.

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I grab another mouse and inject it too. This one doesn't die, but leaves icy prints all over the counter where it walks. The next dissolves in acid. The next kills itself with laser vision. Soon, I'm

out of mice. About 3/4 have died, but the rest are successes.

"1 in 4," I muse aloud. "Not bad, not bad. Maybe a smaller dosage next time."

I grab my phone and call the lab. "Robyn, can you have some more mice sent over? I seem to have run out."

I grab my things, leaving the dead mice. The rest go back in the cage. Humming to myself, I walk out the door. The fact that my test is a failure does not bother me. That I have killed around 20 living creatures today does not affect me at all. Rather, I feel quite pleased with myself.

Once I get home, I flop on the the couch. Staring at the ceiling, I contemplate my behavior.

"Maybe Dr. Stelk had a point," I muse. "I better check."

Leaning forward, I grab the envelope of information. Ignoring the other useless pages of data and charts, I flip straight to the "Potential Hazards" page. My eyes scan the text. It's all the usual. Don't overdose. Get a prescription. Never take an untested drug. Blah blah blah.

Then, my eyes alight on a paragraph set aside from the rest. Why didn't I see that earlier? If something's set aside, it's important. I stop scanning and begin actually reading.

"The drug in question may contain fluoroquinolones, broad-spectrum antibiotics (effective for both gram-negative and gram-positive bacteria) that play an important role in treatment of serious bacterial infections. Medical studies have shown that long-term exposure to fluoroquinolones can cause:"

I scan the list. Tendon breakdown, nausea, vomiting, headache, insomnia, etc. Nothing that should be too bad. As I get further down, the side effects become greater. Finally, I get to the last sentence.

"Finally, the last effect has been suspected, but not confirmed. While it has been seen in

patients using the drug, it may only be present in those already inclined to it. The suspected side effects include

Psychosis"

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Chapter 6 by Jess Ash

This strikes me as absurdly funny. I snort at the ridiculousness of it all. Then I giggle. Within seconds, there are tears streaming out my eyes, I am laughing so hard.

"Psychosis! Oh, that's rich. That's really rich. I just love that."

Still laughing, I move off to the kitchen and open the fridge. The flat interior stares back at me. Once again, I have forgotten to go shopping.

I shrug, smile on my lips as I saunter over to the pantry. My eyes alight on a can of green beans and a yellow cake mix.

"Well, then. Don't give me anything to eat, that's fine. Looks like I'm off to the store."

I grab my coat and my taser and walk out of the apartment building. Once outside, I take a deep breath of fresh air and try to loosen my shoulders. I stroll down the street, doing my best to look confident and relaxed.

I go in, grab the groceries, and walk out. I'm turning down the street, about two blocks from my apartment when I hear the footsteps behind me. Just one person by the sound of it, looking to score a little cash.

Instead of a shot of fear, I feel a little excitement pulse through my veins. Glancing behind me, I realize he's almost upon me. As his hand wraps around my mouth, I actually smile.

My teeth sink into his hand, and I taste blood. He lets out a scream that sets my blood pumping with adrenaline. I laugh as my taser shoots out, and within seconds he's on the ground. I kick him in the face, hearing a snap, making sure he won't get up.

He doesn't. Maybe he never will again. I don't particularly care.

I spit out the blood that's still in my mouth, trying to get rid of the taste. I'm still grinning. Wiping my mouth with the back of my hand, I rifle through his pockets. Some car keys, an empty

sandwich bag, nothing of interest. I rise, my smile twisting into a sneer at his lack of objects of interest, and continue home.

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Arriving at the testing facility is the worst thing I've done all week. The disgust I feel is written all over my face as I push through the glass door and walk into the lab. I greet no one, just walk by them and into my personal testing room. More mice are on the table, and I make a mental note to thank Robyn for having sent more over.

I waste no time. I grab the mice and set to work injecting them. Today, they get only half the dosage, and the results are much better. 1/4 of them still die, but I'm getting closer to having a real drug.

About halfway through the testing time, my phone rings. I sigh and dramatically roll my eyes.

"Give me just a moment, will you dear?"

The mouse I'm about to inject doesn't respond. I spin over to the phone.

"Dr. Lee's Lab for Crazy Experiments and Failed Dreams, how can I help you?"

"Dr. Lee, this is Dr. Whitmer. Is this a bad time?"

"Not at all, Dr. Whitmer," I lie through my teeth. In truth, I'm quite irritated at the interruption. My fingers drum on the table. He better make this quick.

"Doctor, I've been talking to your coworkers, and we think that you may be having some issues with your work. You seem very stressed, stretched a little thin perhaps. Maybe you should take some time off."

"No, not at all Doctor!" Lie, but I'm smiling as I say it to get the right tone. "Everything is perfectly fine over here. Testing is going well," I glance at the pile of dead mice, "and I think we may yet see a powered human within our lifetimes!"

He sighs on the other end of the phone. "I'm glad your testing is going well, Dr. Lee, but I'm afraid you don't have a choice. Take the next week off. Go on vacation. visit your family. Tell your

father about the work you're doing here. Then come back when you've got a clear head.

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No. This cannot be happen. I have to finish this. I have to have some time.

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"Doctor, I thank you for your concern, but I'm fine. I don't need personal time. I'm on the edge of a breakthrough."

"Dr. Lee, let me make this perfectly clear. Recently, you have been demonstrating unsafe work behavior. The board wants you to take some time off, and if you don't get control, they are going to cut your funding."

At those words, I snap. "CUT MY FUNDING! Doctor, I have been working on this for six years. SIX YEARS! You can't cut me. Not now. I HAVE to do this. I'm so close, just give me a chance, just--"

He hangs up the phone. I stare at it for a moment, shocked, seething. Then, I let out a blood-curdling scream and throw it at the wall. It shatters instantly, throwing glass all over the room.

"HOW DARE THEY! HOW DARE THEY CUT MY FUNDING! THEY CAN'T DO THIS TO ME!"

The shouting attracts security. The door bursts open, and I quickly sober.

"Sorry. My bad. I just got frustrated and- oh, watch out for the broken glass. But everything's okay now. It's all good in here. Nothing's going on. You can leave now."

I can tell they're suspicious, but they leave anyway. I take a few breaths, trying to calm myself down. Rage still bubbles in my veins.

If they're going to cut me, they won't get the information. It's MY research. I'll take it for myself, find a company that will see the value of my studies.

I grab the bottle of superserum and stick it in my bag. I leave the fire-breathing, laser-vision-wielding mice behind. My personal gift to the company that has become my own personal enemy. And, without a backward glance, I walk out.

Chapter 7 by PierceTheKenleigh



"No, no, no, no! No! Ugh, this is not real, it can't be real!"

I gripe to myself. I still can't believe I'll never make the drug a success. My dream just got thrown into the trashcan. I'm pretty crushed to be

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honest. I am at home now in my room, pacing about. I sift through my bag and look for the superserum, the little bottle shimmers.

"It's so inviting!" I think to myself.

But no, I can't even entertain the idea of injecting the liquid into myself, it's absurd. As much as I would like to, the test results were 1 in 4. A 75% chance I'll die, and a meager 25% chance I'll live with super powers. It's almost suicide, to inject myself with it. But then again, if it works, the result is priceless. Imagine being the first person to ever have extraordinary abilities like a superhero, it's all I've ever dreamed of! Without thinking I whip out a syringe and fill it to inject myself.

"Oh!" I exclaim as I feel it enter my body.

I cannot believe I just did that!

Chapter 8 by No Comment



I sit on my bed. Wait.

Either it works or it doesn't, and it's not like I've got anything to lose. I feel a giggle welling up inside of me, but I tamp it down. I'm a scientist first.

I record the data.

5 MINUTES AFTER INJECTION: the injection site has become swollen, and the blood vessels surrounding it are inflamed, causing long red streaks and a burning feeling throughout my arm. i have yet to feel any other effects aside from nausea, but i believe that to be more due to mental barriers.

7 MINUTES AFTER INJECTION: i have lost feeling in my arm surrounding the injection site. i suddenly find myself much more sympathetic toward the rats.

18 MINUTES AFTER INJECTION: the swelling and numbness have disappeared. i should note that until three minutes ago, the numbness covered my entire body, and i felt sure i was going to die. at that point, i was physically incapable of writing.

25 MINUTES AFTER INJECTION: i feel energy deep in my chest. it feels like a cough that never goes away. my breathing is in order.

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I click my pen closed and rise from my bed. All of my reservations are gone now, replaced by clear thoughts. *How did the mice do it?* I wonder. Clearly, they had no control over their powers, as was demonstrated by their constant accidents. I need to maintain control of... whatever I've done to myself.

Of course, I could also spontaneously combust as soon as I try to access my powers.

A smirk pulls across my lips. If I have to combust, I know exactly where I want to do it.

*

Dr. Whitmer is on the phone when I come in. Destroying another genius's funding, no doubt. Anger rises in me, but I don't let it take control. I want to talk first.

He looks at me with pity. "Dr. Lee, I was hoping you would visit."

I realize that I must look like a mess. The serum really did a number on me, and I'm still in my wrinkled, stained lab coat. Frantically, I try to straighten it. I want this meeting to leave an impression.

"I wanted to talk to you about your funding. Now, I'm sure you understand that our only concern is your health--"

I hold up a finger to silence him. "No, Dr. Whitmer. I'm going to talk, and you're going to listen."

Everything is quiet. I hadn't realized how loud my thoughts have been recently, but everything is *quiet*. My brain is no longer running around trying desperately to save everything before it falls apart. It's exhilarating.

He's talking again. About options, about tenure. God, is he trying to get me to *teach*? I'm not a teacher, I'm a scientist!

I slam my hands on his desk, and tiny sparks fly. They embed themselves in the wood and spread out into beautiful, swirling filaments.

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We both stare,

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He is quiet again.

I laugh. "I told you we should have started with human testing."

He looks afraid.

"But it works! I told you it would work if you just gave me a little more *time*. That's all I ever needed. The rats couldn't control it, that's why they all died--"

"All the rats died?" he asks. "Why didn't you tell us--"

"Don't interrupt!" I snarled at him. "I told you, this time you're going to *listen to me!* I'm a *genius*. I've made myself a superhero, and all you can think about are *rats?*" There is thunder cracking outside, as if to punctuate my point. "I've done the impossible! You didn't believe in me, the investors didn't believe in me, but *I* believed in me!" The thunder growls and grows and doesn't stop. It's a tenor in the air. My hair stands on end and nothing has ever felt so gloriously *right*.

I electrocute Dr. Whitmer.

I don't think I meant to, it just happened. One moment, I'm standing there in a righteous fury, and the next moment Dr. Whitmer is a charred husk of his former self. Or just a charred husk in general.

The thunder fades off into the distance.

It's quiet again, and I feel... incredible.

It's only after I visit a few more investors that I realize what I'm doing. I've become a villain. Not even a *supervillain*, just a murderer.

Well.

That can change. I change my course. Mr. Pontmercy gets to live another day. But the rest of the city better watch out. Voltage is on the prowl.

After all, all I ever wanted was to See more of Story Wars

What better way to bring

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